

Thank you

26 November 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Alternative U.S. Strategies in Paris

1. There are two general approaches the U.S. could adopt in the next phase of the Paris negotiations. First, the U.S. could concentrate further de-escalatory measures to reduce the level of fighting, leading eventually to a cease fire and the phased reduction of U.S. forces. The second approach would concentrate on probing for the best possible terms for a political settlement, while intensifying the combat in South Vietnam as a means of keeping pressure on the DRV and, simultaneously, avoiding negotiation topics that could constrain allied activity in South Vietnam.
2. Negotiating strategies, of course, are means whose choice should be dictated by a prior choice of ends. The real question here is whether the U.S. is primarily interested in disengagement at the earliest possible time or in obtaining an optimum negotiated settlement. The former objective is implied in the first negotiating strategy; the latter in the second. We are strongly inclined to the second for several reasons.
3. First of all, it has the advantage of retaining maximum flexibility; if desired it would always be possible to shift over to the disengagement process. But once the U.S. launches upon a course of reducing the fighting, then it would seem extremely difficult to reverse it and go back to a tougher bargaining stance and heavier fighting on the ground. Secondly, maintaining a strong position in Paris and intensive combat in the South would be reassuring to the South Vietnamese during the initial stages of their participation in the negotiations. Such a reassurance will be almost mandatory as the talks enter into basic and sensitive subjects -- troop withdrawal, internal political settlement etc. There is bound to be haggling and maneuvering over the agenda and order of items, haggling the Communists will try to utilize to drive a wedge between the U.S. and the GVN. An early agreement between Washington and Saigon on such critical questions as cease fire or internal political arrangements for the Front should be agreed upon as soon as feasible.

4. While the Communist position relegates a cease fire to the last stage of a settlement, the U.S. would nevertheless be well advised to be prepared to handle a proposal for an early cease fire. The question of some temporary truces at Christmas and Tet will almost certainly arise, perhaps at Communist initiative.

5. Finally, we are persuaded that the military strategy already under way -- increased pressure on the Communist infrastructure and extension of territorial security -- could yield important political dividends. These would be increased if in conjunction with this military activity, the pacification and PHOENIX (anti-infrastructure) efforts were pushed as hard as possible. For their part the Communist have already begun to concentrate their military effort against vulnerable hamlets, seeking to lay claim to as much territory as possible at the bargaining counter. Denying them this option would go a long way toward putting pressure on their negotiators in Paris. We assume, of course, that allied force will continue to cope with the Main Forces and wherever possible disrupt and destroy them.

6. In short, we believe it will be well worth it if the U.S. can concentrate over the next few months on maintaining a tough negotiating posture and putting further military pressures on Communist forces. Only after this has been tried are we likely to discover the real terms which the Communists will accept in a final settlement.

1- Paris Board
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VIETNAM AFFAIRS STAFF
O/DCI

DATE: 26 Nov 68

TO: The Director

FROM: GACarver, Jr.

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

Attached is our note on negotiation strategy. It was drafted by [] of ONE but is a joint project in which the participants were Messrs.

A point not made in the memo but important is that the first (Clifford) negotiation strategy would, in effect, foreclose the next administration's options. The second (modified Rostow) strategy would not. This is another reason why we favor the second.

[]
George A. Carver, Jr.

Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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